

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 290152 TOSEC 310140

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FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 8158 ACTION SECSTATE DTD 26 NOV

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 8158

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT JO SY
SUBJ: JORDANIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS

REF: AMMAN 6992

1. FIRST OF ALL, WHILE I HAVE NOT DISCUSSED WITH ASAD HIS CURRENT VIEWS ON JORDANIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS, NONETHELESS BELIEVE HIS ANSWER TO ANY SUCH DIRECT QUESTION WOULD BE PREDICTABLE, SHORT AND NOT VERY INFORMATIVE: CLOSER RELATIONS BETWEEN ARABS ARE OBVIOUSLY A DESIRABLE THING. THIS WAS HIS STANDARD COMMENT TO THE SECRETARY IN PAST DISCUSSIONS BEARING ON RELATIONS BETWEEN SYRIA AND OTHER ARAB STATES.

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2. I CONSIDER THAT SYRIA'S INTEREST IN CLOSER ECONOMIC TIES WITH JORDAN ARE GENUINE AND MAY CONTAIN A NEW AWARENESS OF SYRIAN SELF-INTEREST. A YEAR AGO MINISTER OF ECONOMY IMADI CHARACTERIZED CLOSER TIES AS BENEFITING JORDAN MORE THAN SYRIA, GIVEN THE RELATIVE SIZE OF THEIR MARKETS. RECENT EVENTS HAVE SHOWN THAT AMMAN IN SOME AREAS IS ABLE TO HELP DAMASCUS PERHAPS MORE THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND. RECENT COORDINATION BETWEEN SYRIAN AND JORDANIAN CIVIL AIR AUTHORITIES, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THE JORDANIANS ARE FAR MORE ADEPT AT PULLING TOGETHER A CASE FOR LANDING RIGHTS IN NEW YORK, WHICH THE SYRIANS VERY MUCH WANT BUT WHICH, GIVEN BUREAUCRATIC INEPTITUDE, THEY HAVE BEEN INCAPABLE OF PRESENTING.

3. A CLOSER ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP WITH JORDAN IS ALSO USEFUL TO ASAD AS ONE WHO HAS TRIED SEVERAL DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO ENCOURAGE PRIVATE ENTERPRISE IN SYRIA. CLOSER LINKS WITH JORDAN, SUCH AS THE FREE TRADE ZONE ALONG THE BORDER, MAY BE USED BY ASAD AS AN END RUN TO LIBERALIZE SYRIAN INTERNAL REGULATIONS BY BLUNTING ABILITY OF BAATHI IDEOLOGUES TO CRITICIZE ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION. (IN DOING SO, THEY WOULD BE CRITICIZING A FRIENDLY ARAB COUNTRY.) IF AND WHEN SUCH FREE ZONE GETS UNDERWAY, THE JORDANIAN PRESENCE THERE COULD WELL INCLUDE SYRIANS WHO FLED THIS COUNTRY'S NATIONALIZATIONS IN THE EARLY SIXTIES TO START ANEW IN JORDAN WHERE WE UNDERSTAND THEY ARE AMONG ITS MOST DYNAMIC ENTREPRENEURS.

4. BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE ONLY REASON FOR ASAD TO PUSH FOR CLOSER FORMAL TIES WITH JORDAN AT THIS POINT WOULD LIE IN HIS PERCEPTION THAT A NEW CHAPTER IN ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE NEGOTIATIONS MAY BE APPROACHING. THAT PROSPECT MIGHT INCLINE HIM TO PRESS MORE INSISTENTLY FOR A FORMALIZED RELATIONSHIP WITH JORDAN, ACTING ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT GREATER UNITY ON THE ARAB SIDE CAN ONLY HELP THE OVERALL ARAB NEGOTIATING POSITION. HERE, HOWEVER, SEVERAL PROBLEMS IMMEDIATELY ARISE. WHAT WILL EGYPT'S REACTION BE? IT IS NOT OUR IMPRESSION THAT CAIRO HAS YET ABANDONED ITS VIEW OF CLOSER JORDANIAN-SYRIAN TIES AS A CHALLENGE TO EGYPT. ASAD MUST ALSO WEIGH FORMALIZING HIS JORDANIAN RELATIONSHIP AGAINST THE

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POSSIBLE COST TO HIS PALESTINIAN AND EVEN LEBANESE RELATIONS. IF WE CAN ASSUME, AND I THINK IT REASONABLE, THAT HE HOPES FOR FUTURE SYRIAN HEGEMONY OVER JORDAN, LEBANON AND THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT, HE MUST ORCHESTRATE HIS APPROACH SO AS NOT TO APPEAR TO BE IMPOSING UNITY BUT TO BE RESPONDING TO THE DESIRES OF THE OTHER PARTIES. IF HE PUSHES TOO HARD TOO SOON, HIS EFFORTS COULD SET BACK EVEN THE LIMITED PROGRESS MADE TO DATE IN JORDANIAN-

SYRIAN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RAPPROCHEMENT.HE WILL ALSO GIVE
WEIGHT TO POSSIBLE ISRAELI REACTIONS, ALTHOUGH LESS THAN TO
ARAB CONSIDERATIONS.

5. IT SEEMS THAT IF WE VIEW THIS QUESTION IN
THE CONTEXT OF THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, THAT THE LEBANESE
CRISIS IS STILL TOO GREATLY PREOCCUPYING ASAD FOR HIM TO
PRESS HUSSEIN INTO A CORNER FOR CLOSER TIES.

6. DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS AMMAN. MURPHY UNQTE ROBINSON

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